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The University of Montana

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UM RESEARCHER: FOREST PRODUCTS JOBS, PRODUCTION WILL DECLINE DURING 1994

MISSOULA --

Montana's forest products industry will experience substantial declines in employment and production in 1994, reports a researcher with The University of Montana's Bureau of Business and Economic Research.

Charles Keegan, director of the bureau's forest industry research, said mill closures in November and December dropped employment from 4,550 workers in the first part of 1993 to fewer than 4,100 workers at the end of the year. Additional closures have been announced during the first quarter of 1994, he said.

"Surprisingly, overall average annual production employment and workers' wages increased in 1993 in spite of lower lumber and plywood production and mill closures," Keegan said.

The higher than expected employment came about because in 1993 mills employed more production workers per volume of timber processed than in any of the past ten years, he said.

"Higher lumber prices made it feasible for mills to process lower quality timber, which required more labor," Keegan said. "High prices also led to greater efforts to maximize lumber output from the timber."

Monthly production employment averaged 4,471 in 1993, up from 4,454 workers in 1992, he said. In 1993, these workers earned about \$144 million in wages compared with \$137 million in

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1992, he added.

Montana's lumber and plywood production for 1993 declined from 1992 production levels, Keegan said. Montana sawmills produced 1,391 million board feet of lumber in 1993, compared with the previous year's 1,455 million board feet; plywood production in 1993 was 687 million square feet, down from 699 million square feet in 1992, he said.

In cooperation with the Montana Wood Products Association, the bureau compiles quarterly figures for the 29 plants responsible for more than 90 percent of the state's total output of wood and paper products.

The above figures refer only to production workers at sawmills, plywood plants, pulp and paper mills, particleboard and fiberboard plants, and utility pole plants. These production workers account for about 40 percent of the workers in Montana's forest products industry. Estimates do not include the several thousand workers in logging, trucking and other related jobs.

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